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ABSTRACT

Perceptions of 530 freshman students concerning their academic preparation for college was studied. Respondents indicated (1) the adequacy of their high school preparation and (2) the skills they believed needed more emphasis in high school. Two-thirds of the predominantly white sample completed a college preparatory curriculum, and 84 percent had attended public high schools. During the first semester of college, 40 percent had grade point averages of "B" or better, with another 45 percent receiving "C." Although the students desired more extensive preparation in mathematics, English, and study skills, they were generally satisfied with their college preparation and felt that their basic academic skills were adequate or better. Students wished that they had been required to do more writing and more serious reading in their high school classes, and nearly one-half said that they seldom had to use the library to complete class assignments. Nearly half of the students felt that they did not learn how to study in high school, and the majority worked at a part-time job during their senior year in high school. A majority said that too much of the work in high school was "busy work" and that they wished their high school classes had been harder and more demanding. (SW)

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COLLEGE FRESHMEN VIEW THEIR HIGH SCHOOL PREPARATION

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is on freshman student perceptions of their academic preparation for college. Over 500 college freshmen were surveyed after one semester of college in order to ascertain their views on the adequacy of their high school preparation and the skills they believe need more emphasis in the high school. These students' perceptions of their preparation for college do not agree with the views on student preparation reported in surveys of faculty. Although the students expressed a wish for more extensive preparation in mathematics, English and study skills, they were generally satisfied with their preparation for college and felt that their basic academic skills were adequate or better. They rated themselves lowest on study skills. The students' satisfactory achievement during the first semester tended to support their perceptions of adequate preparation for college.

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COLLEGE FRESHMEN VIEW THEIR HIGH SCHOOL PREPARATION

Introduction

The majority of our nation's high school graduates now have the opportunity to attend college. Many of those entering college, however, may not be successful because of inadequate high school preparation. Recent reports such as A Nation at Risk, Academic Preparation for College, and High Schools: A Report on Secondary Education in America indicate that many college entrants do not have the basic academic skills needed for success in college. College and university professors have reported that more and more of their students show poor study habits, weak mathematics skills, and an inability to write well, among other weaknesses. One study concluded that 30 to 40 percent of high school students who go to college have to take remedial courses. (The Chronicle of Higher Education, November 3, 1982.)

A recent Purdue University study revealed a steady decline there in overall mathematics test scores from 1977 to 1982. The study concluded that most high school graduates in Indiana, arrive at college unready for high technology mathematics, despite taking preparatory classes. "As we become a high technology society, students who cannot grasp these basic concepts in mathematics early in their education will not be able to compete in college and later in the job market," said Professor Dennis H. Sorge. (The Herald-Telephone, January 17, 1984.)

The University of Iowa reported complaints of administrators that many of Iowa's high school students are not well prepared to progress at a normal rate through college. One spokesman said, "We get students who claim they have never written a term paper, never outlined a paper, and never taken an essay test." (The IU Newspaper 8:3 May 8, 1984).

A recent report from Indiana University/Purdue University at Indianapolis said that IUPUI now places about 40 percent of incoming students in remedial writing programs. This statistic was encouraging, however, since the figure had been 62 percent in 1980. (The IU Newspaper 8:1 February 3, 1984).

Earlier studies by the author have looked at the academic preparation of university freshmen. A 1981 study (Jacobs, 1981) found that a majority of the professors at a large midwestern university were not satisfied with freshman students' basic verbal and mathematical skills and believed that they had shown continuing decline. Another study (Jacobs, 1983) asked professors teaching 100-level courses to specify the academic skills and competencies that they considered to be basic and essential for entering college students. These faculty members identified a number of specific skills in English, reading, mathematics, reasoning, speaking/listening and studying that they expect entering freshmen to have when they come to the university.

While faculty and administrators have expressed their concern, there is a paucity of data on how students themselves feel about their preparation for college. The present study focuses on perceptions of university

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freshman students concerning their preparation for college. How do they view their academic skills and their preparedness for college? Do they feel as underprepared as college faculty believe they are? Are there skills they think need more attention in the high school?

It is important that we look at student perceptions because these perceptions will remain with the students to influence their academic self-concepts and their academic decisions.

Procedure

This survey of 530 freshmen at a large midwestern university was conducted during the spring semester of 1984. The sample was thus composed of students who had completed approximately one and one-half semesters of college work. A questionnaire containing both closed and open-ended questions was designed to gather the perceptions of the freshman students concerning their preparation for college work. (A copy of the complete questionnaire is available upon request from the author.)

Instructors teaching 100-level courses were contacted for permission to distribute a questionnaire to the freshmen in their classes. In order to obtain a representative sample, the questionnaires were distributed to students in a wide variety of classes including ones in geology, English, history, psychology, mathematics, sociology, reading, and library skills. Participation on the part of the student was completely voluntary and anonymity was guaranteed.

The results were tabulated for the total group as well as separately for males and females and for public and private school graduates. A breakdown of responses was also made on the basis of rank in high school graduating class, type of high school curriculum, size of high school graduating class and first semester grade point average at the university. Chi square tests were used to test for differences among the groups.

Results

Table 1 presents descriptive data on the sample of freshmen included in the study.

It can be seen in Table 1 that the students included in the survey were predominantly white and more than half were females. Eighty-four percent of the freshmen had attended public high schools with approximately two-thirds of the total sample taking a college preparatory curriculum. The majority of the students attended high schools with 250 or more in the graduating class. One-half of this sample reported that they ranked in the top fifth of their graduating class with another 43 percent in the second and middle fifths.

The self-reported GPA's of the freshmen surveyed indicated that most had performed satisfactorily during their first semester of college. Forty percent had GPA's of B or better with another 45 percent receiving a GPA equivalent to a C or C+. Those students who took an academic or college

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Table 1. Bicgraphic Data or the Freshman Sample (N=530)

Biographic Variables	N	Percent
Sex		
Female	317	60
Male	199	38
No Response	14	2
Race		
White	454	86
Black	53	10
Other	9	1
No Response	14	3
High School		
Public	443	84
Private	72	14
No Response	15	3
Type of High School Curriculum		
Academic or College Preparatory	337	64
General	137	26
Career-Oriented	32	6
Other	10	2
No Response	14	3
Size of High School Graduating Class		
750 or more	54	10
500-749	118	22
250-499	187	35
100-249	119	23
Fewer than 100	37	7
No Response	15	3
Rank in High School Graduating Class		
Top Fifth	263	50
Highest Tenth N=119 %=23		
Second Tenth N=144 %=27		
Second Fifth	151	28
Middle Fifth	79	15
Fourth Fifth	12	2
Lowest Fifth	4	1
No Response	21	4
First Semester GPA		
3.50 or above	74	14
3.00 - 3.49	136	26
2.50 - 2.99	145	27
2.00 - 2.49	97	18
1.50 - 1.99	41	8
1.00 - 1.49	10	2
Below 1.00	8	1
No Response	19	4
Intended Major		
1) Humanities	38	7
2) Social Science	51	10
3) Physical Science	48	9
4) Mathematics	7	1
5) Music/Fine Arts	17	3
6) Computer Science	21	4
7) Business	208	39
8) Education	34	6
9) Other	76	14
No Response	30	6

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preparatory curriculum in high school tended to receive significantly higher GPA's than the students in a general or career oriented curriculum. Also the students with higher ranks in the high school class received higher GPA's at the university. The students indicated a wide variety of intended majors with business attracting the largest number (39 percent).

The responses of the students to 18 opinion statements concerning their high school experience are shown in Table 2. The responses were on a five point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Numerical values from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) were assigned to the response categories and a mean opinion calculated for each statement.

The freshmen agreed overwhelmingly that college work is a great deal more challenging than high school. Forty-three percent of the students said that most of their high school classes were not challenging. A majority felt that too much of the work in high school was "busy work" and that they wished their high school classes had been tougher and more demanding. But they disagreed that they had taken too many easy courses in high school. Most of the students felt that their high school teachers were concerned that they learn the subjects they were teaching, but said the teachers did not teach any study skills for their particular subject. Nearly one-half (45 percent) of those surveyed said they did not learn how to study in high school.

Although a majority of the students reported that they learned how to write papers in high school English, they expressed a wish that they had been required to do more writing in all their high school classes. Over 60 percent of the respondents would have preferred more required serious reading. Fifty-three percent said they were able to perform satisfactorily in high school classes without having to complete reading assignments. Although the freshman students reported that they chose classes in high school that would prepare them for college, they believed that most of their classmates were not serious about learning as much as they could. Students were about evenly divided on whether they thought more discipline would have increased their learning in high school.

A breakdown of the responses by sex and a subsequent chi square analysis revealed significant differences on only one opinion statement in Table 2. Males and females differed significantly on the statement: "I wish that I had been required to do more writing in all my high school subjects." A higher percentage of females than males tended to strongly agree with this statement.

Responses to these statements were also cross-tabulated with the type of high school the students attended. A chi square test indicated a relationship between the type of high school and responses to four of the statements. Specifically, the students from public high schools tended to agree or strongly agree with the statements: "I wish that my high school had been tougher and more demanding"; "I did not learn how to study in high school"; "I feel I would have learned more if there had been more discipline in my high school classes"; and "I wish that I had been required to do more writing in all my high school subjects," while private school students tended to disagree or strongly disagree.

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Table 2. Response of freshman sample to opinion statements about high school experiences (percentages).

	SA	A	U	D	SD	MEAN*
1. I wish that my high school classes had been tougher and more demanding.	24	34	12	24	6	2.50
2. Most of my high school classmates were serious about learning as much as they could in our classes.	5	20	16	44	15	3.42
3. I chose classes in high school that I thought would help me prepare for college.	48	35	7	7	3	1.80
4. I did not learn how to study in high school.	16	27	15	28	12	2.90
5. I feel I would have learned more if there had been more discipline in my high school classes.	15	22	20	32	10	2.99
6. I chose too many easy courses in high school.	5	11	11	47	26	3.80
7. Most of my high school teachers were concerned that I learn the subject they were teaching.	20	50	16	12	2	2.27
8. I was able to do O.K. in my high school classes without having to complete reading assignments.	17	38	14	27	4	2.64
9. I always studied for tests in high school.	19	33	11	30	7	2.74
10. I learned how to write essays and term papers in my high school English classes.	31	40	10	11	7	2.22
11. I wish that I had taken more math courses in high school.	24	18	12	30	17	2.99
12. I wish that I had been required to do more serious reading in high school	24	37	16	18	5	2.45
13. In my high school classes, teachers included work study skills for their particular subject.	4	24	25	36	11	3.25
14. I wish that I had been required to do more writing in all my high school subjects.	13	30	18	27	6	2.72
15. Too much of the work in my high school classes was simply "busy work."	21	33	21	20	5	2.55
16. In high school, I learned how to take essay tests.	14	37	14	21	15	2.87
17. Most of my high school classes did not challenge me.	14	29	20	31	6	2.86
18. I find college work a great deal more demanding than high school work.	53	25	8	7	1	1.66

*Strongly agree = 1, Strongly disagree = 5

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There was no significant relationship between the size of the high school graduating class and the students' responses to any of the opinion statements. There was a significant relationship, however, between the type of high school curriculum and the responses to three of the statements. A significantly higher proportion of the students who took a general or career oriented type of high school curriculum agreed or stongly agreed to the statements: "I did not learn how to study in high school," and "I wish that I had taken more math courses in high school." Those students who took an academic or college preparatory curriculum tended to disagree to the above statements, but were more likely to agree to the statement: "In high school I learned how to take essay tests." The students' rank in their high school graduating class was significantly related to the responses on a number of the statements about high school experiences. The students who were in the top fifth of their graduating class tended to disagree to the statement: "I did not learn how to study in high school," while those in the second fifth and the lower three fifths tended to agree. The students in the upper 40 percent of their graduating class tended to disegree to the statements: "I feel I would have learned more if there had been more discipline in my high school classes," "I chose too many easy courses in high school," and "I wish that I had taken more math courses in high school," while those in the lower three-fifths agreed. On the latter statement, 73 percent of those students who ranked in the lowere three-fifths indicated agreement, while only 32 percent and 39 percent in the top fifth and second fifth, respectively, agreed.

Those students who were in the top 40 percent were more likely to agree that they learned how to write essays and term papers and learned how to take essay tests. The students in the top fifth as well as those in the lower three fifth agreed that most of their high school classes did not challenge them.

A break-down was also made to determine if students who performed at different levels during their first semester in college had different attitudes about the high school experience. There was a significant relationship between first semester GPA and responses to two of the statements. The students who earned a GPA below 3.00 tended to agree to the statements: "I did not learn how to study in high school," and "I wish that I had taken more math courses in high school."

The students were asked about specific high school academic experiences. The responses summarized in Table 3 indicate considerable variation in the amount of writing of themes, essays, and term papers that was required of these students.

Slightly more than one-third of the students reported that they were required to write 15 or more papers; the remaining students were almost equally divided in reporting 10-14, 5-9, and 1-4 required papers during high school. Little writing was required for daily class assignments. "One-half to 1 page" was the amount of daily writing reported by 44 percent of the students. Eighty-nine percent of the freshman students said that most of their tests in high school were objective.

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Table 3. Responses to Questions on Specific High School Experiences. (N=530)

	N	Percent
Were most of your tests in high school essay or objective?		
1. Essay	54	10
2. Objective	473	89
No response	3	1
Approximately how many themes, essays, or term papers were you required to write during your high school career?		
1. 15 or more	193	36
2. 10-14	113	21
3. 5-9	112	21
4. 1-4	104	20
5. none	6	1
No response	2	0.4
In high school approximately how often did you need to use the library in order to complete class assignments?		
1. Several times a week	31	6
2. About once a week	127	24
3. Several times a month	93	17
4. Seldom	256	48
5. Never	21	4
No response	2	0.4
On the average, how much time did you spend each night doing your high school homework?		
1. More than 4 hours	26	5
2. 3-4 hours	90	17
3. 2 hours	128	24
4. More than 1 but less than 2 hours	95	18
5. 1 hour	77	14
6. Less than 1 hour	109	21
No response	5	1
How often in high school would you say you had reading assignments for homework?		
1. Every weekday	142	27
2. Three times per week	187	35
3. One or two time per week	149	28
4. Occasionally	49	9
No response	3	0.6
In the homework you were required to do in high school, how much writing would you say you did each day for all you class assignments?		
1. Less than one-half page	75	14
2. One-half to 1 page	235	44
3. 2-4 pages	183	35
4. More than 4 pages	30	6
No response	7	1
During your senior year in high school, how much TV did you watch on an average weekday evening?		
1. One hour or less	162	31
2. More than 1 hour, but less than 2	122	23
3. 2-3 hours	172	32
4. 4-6 hours	48	9
5. More than 6 hours	22	4
No response	4	0.8
During your senior year in high school, how many hours a week on the average, did you work at a part-time job?		
1. None	180	34
2. Less than 6 hours	42	8
3. 6-10 hours	53	10
4. 11-15 hours	79	15
5. 16-20 hours	86	16
6. 21-25 hours	43	8
7. 26-30 hours	27	5
8. More than 30 hours	16	3
No response	4	0.8
How much of the same foreign language did you have in high school?		
1. None	53	10
2. Less than 1 year	22	4
3. 1 year	72	14
4. 2 years	181	34
5. 3 years	98	18
6. More than 3 years	100	19
No response	4	0.8

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Nearly one-half (48 percent) of those surveyed said "seldom" when asked how often they used the library for class assignments; one-fourth reported using the library about once a week, while only six percent used the library several times a week.

The majority of the students reported studying one to two hours each night, but 21 percent of the students said they studied less than one hour. About one-third of this sample said they averaged two to three hours of television on week-day evenings.

Part-time jobs occupied two-thirds of the students during their senior year in high school. From 11-15 or 16-20 hours per week were the most frequently reported working patterns. Ninety percent of the students reported having some foreign language in high school. The most popular foreign language study for these students was two years of the same language (34 percent). It was interesting to find that 37 percent of the students reported having taken three or more years of the same language.

A comparison of the responses of males and females to the questions in Table 3 revealed significant differences in only two areas. Females reported spending a significantly longer time doing homework each night. The most popular response for male students was "less than one hour" while the highest percentage of females said "two hours." Males worked a significantly greater number of hours at a part-time job during their senior year in high school than did female students.

A breakdown by type of high school revealed significant differences between public and private high school students on type of tests and frequency of reading assignments. Private school students tended to report that most of their high school tests were essay and that they had more frequent reading assignments than did public school students.

The responses to these items were also cross-tabulated with the size of the high school graduating class. Those students whose graduating class was composed of 500 or more students reported significantly greater use of the library for completing class assignments than did those students from smaller schools.

Table 4 presents students' perceptions of their high school preparation.

Almost half (48 percent) of the students believe that they "learned a lot" in most of their high school subjects while 31 percent said they "learned a lot" in about half of their subjects. Forty-one percent of the freshmen said that most of the academic skills they need to do well in college were deliberately worked on in their high school classes. A combined 33 percent felt that "few" to "about half" of the necessary skills were worked on in high school. The highest percentage of the overall sample of students identified English as the subject area in which they received the best preparation for college work. A break-down of the responses of males and females, however, showed significant differences on the question. A significantly greater percentage of females than males said "English"; more males tended to believe they received the best preparation in mathematics. When asked the subject in which they received the poorest preparation, the most common overall response (30 percent) was "Mathematics." The remaining

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Table 4. Student responses to questions concerning perceptions of their preparation for college.

	N	Percent
In how many of your high school subjects would you say that you "learned a lot"?		
1. In all my subjects	33	6
2. In most of my subjects	250	48
3. In about half of my subjects	166	31
4. In less than half of my subjects	74	14
5. In none	3	0.6
No response	1	0.1
In general, how satisfied are you with your high school preparation for college-level work?		
1. Very satisfied	66	12
2. Satisfied	175	33
3. Not sure	112	21
4. Dissatisfied	124	23
5. Very dissatisfied	45	9
No response	6	2
How many of the academic skills that you need right now to perform well in your college classes were deliberately worked on in your high school classes?		
1. All	100	19
2. Most	216	41
3. About half	143	27
4. Few	67	12
5. None	3	0.6
No response	1	0.1
In what high school subject area do you feel you received the <u>best</u> preparation for college?		
1. English	227	43
2. Mathematics	141	26
3. Social Studies	54	10
4. Science	36	7
5. Foreign Language	37	7
6. Music/Art	15	3
7. Other	11	2
No response	9	2
In what high school subject area do you feel you received the <u>poorest</u> preparation for college?		
1. English	79	15
2. Mathematics	176	33
3. Social Science	67	13
4. Science	83	16
5. Foreign Language	58	11
6. Music/Art	43	8
7. Other	18	3
No response	7	1

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responses were distributed fairly evenly across other subject areas. The students were then asked to indicate a general level of satisfaction with their high school preparation. A combined 45 percent said they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" while 32 percent said they were "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied." Another 21 percent was not sure.

There was no relationship between the size of the high school attended and the students' responses to any of the items in Table 4. There were significant differences, however, in the expressed satisfaction with their high school preparation among students who ranked at different levels in the graduating class. Those students in the upper 40 percent of the high school graduating class were more likely to report that they were satisfied or very satisfied, while those in the lower 60 percent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Fifty-seven percent of that latter group said they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied compared with only 19 percent of the former group. As might be expected, the students who performed well during their first semester of college (GPA $\geq$ 3.0) indicated significantly greater satisfaction with their high school preparation than did students who received lower GPA's. For example, 62 percent of those with GPA's $\geq$ 3.0 indicated they they were satisfied or very satisfied, while only 36 percent of those with lower GPA's said they were satisfied.

Interesting results were obtained when the freshman students were asked to rate their basic academic skills.

Table 5. Students' perceptions of their proficiency in the basic academic skills (Percentages).

	Excellent	More Than Adequate	Adequate	Less Than Adequate	Poor	Mean Rating*
Reading	18	33	40	8	1	2.39
Writing (composition)	10	38	39	10	3	2.57
Mathematics	10	26	30	22	12	2.99
Reasoning/Critical Thinking	11	36	38	14	1	2.59
Study Skills	8	21	38	23	10	3.06

*Excellent = 1, Poor = 5

Generally, the students rated their skills as adequate to more than adequate for the demands of college classes. Table 5 shows that "adequate" was the most popular single rating for all of the skills. Students rated themselves highest on reading. A majority of the students perceived their reading skills as excellent or more than adequate. Only nine percent felt their reading skills were less than adequate or poor. Second to reading were reasoning/critical thinking and writing (composition) skills. The students gave almost identical proficiency ratings to these two academic skills. Almost one-half of the students rated their reasoning and writing skills as more than adequate or excellent. The weakest areas appeared to be mathematics and study skills, where one-third of the students felt their skills were less than adequate or poor.

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There were significant differences between males and females only in their rating of reasoning/critical thinking skills. A significantly greater number of males than females gave high ratings to their reasoning skills. Students from private high schools tended to give higher ratings to their study skills than did the public school graduates.

A significant relationship was found between rank in the high school graduating class and students' ratings of two of the basic skills. Those student who were in the top 40 percent of their high school class tended to rate their mathematics skills more favorably than did those in the lower three-fifths. Forty-five percent of students in the lower three-fifths gave such ratings. Students in the top 20 percent of the high school class gave significantly higher ratings to their study skills than did students who were in the lower 60 percent.

The atings differed according to the students' academic success during the first semester. The students who received a GPA≥ 3.0 tended to give significantly higher ratings to their mathematics and study skills.

Two open-ended questions were included in the survey. The first asked the students what they would do differently if they could take high school over again. Table 6 summarizes the most frequently stated responses of the 439 students who answered this question.

Table 6. Responses to question: If you could take your high chool years over again, what would you differently? (N=439)

	N	Percent
1. Take more mathematics	146	33
2. Study harder and/or more	128	29
3. Take more English (to learn writing skills)	89	20
4. Learn how to study/get good study skills	68	15
5. Take more science	63	14
6. Take high school more seriously	50	12
7. Read more on my own	33	8
8. Take harder and more challenging courses	26	6
9. Take more foreign languages	20	5
10. Take college preparatory courses	21	5
11. Try to learn all I could (instead of just memorizing to pass tests or get good grades).	16	4
12. Be more involved in school activities	18	4
13. Go to a different school	24	5
14. Nothing	35	8

The most frequently reported responses indicate that the students would "study harder" and "take more mathematics." They would learn how to study in high school. Varying numbers of students said they would take a more difficult and challenging high school curriculum. Specifically, they would take more English, science and foreign language. It was interesting that a

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number of students said they would learn all they could rather than just try to get good grades. Some typical responses to this questions were: "I never studied in high school. I still did well which is all I cared about then. Had I gotten into the study habit then I could study better now and I would be better prepared for college." Another student wrote: "I would take it more seriously and really try to learn the material. When in high school, I just wanted to pass the course and I didn't really care how much I learned. I felt that most of the material was irrelevant anyway." Another said, "I would take time to establish some study habits. Although I did well in high school (3.6 GPA) I never <u>really</u> learned how to sit down and study."

Other comments were: "I would pay attention and take high school seriously. High school kids just don't realize what college is like. I wish I'd known." "I would learn as much as I could. Also, I would make sure my advisor was helping me choose the right classes that I need for college, so I wouldn't be in the situation that I now am in." "In high school I was worried about my grade point average. I thought taking algebra, trigonometry or calculus would lower my GPA so I didn't take them. I knew I could get into college with only 2 years of math. My school offered classes in essay writing but they were an elective so I didn't have to take them." " I wish I would have been forced to take more math classes to graduate, and 3 or more years of a language." "I would take the rigorous math route (alg.I, alg.II, geom., trig.?), also chemistry and biology all four years, along with foreign language and English." "I would have worried less about grades and more about learning."

The second question asked the freshmen what recommendations they would make to 9th graders on how best to prepare for college. Table 7 summarizes their responses.

<u>Table 7</u>. Responses to question: If you were asked to make recommendations to 9th graders on how best to prepare for college, what would you tell them? (N=433)

	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
1. Study hard	146	33
2. Take all the mathematics possible	130	30
3. Learn how to study/get good study skills	113	26
4. Take all the English possible	100	23
5. Take all the science possible	100	23
6. Take college preparatory classes	64	15
7. Read as much as you can	46	10
8. Take all the foreign language possible	38	9
9. Learn how to write essays and term papers	47	11
10. Take the most difficult courses you can handle	56	13
11. Learn all you can - don't worry about grades	50	11
12. Learn how to use your time wisely	35	8
13. Take a wide variety of classes (discover interests)	27	6
14. Get help if you don't understand a subject	15	3
15. Get involved in school activities	16	4
16. Take reading classes (for speed and comprehension)	10	2

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The freshman students recommend that the best way to prepare for college is to study hard in high school and to acquire good study habits. They recommended that high school students take as many college preparatory level classes in math., science, and English as possible. Students are urged to read on their own and to learn how to write papers. Many students recommended that students take the hardest courses possible without worrying about grades. Several students recommended that high school students not listen to the counselors about what courses to take. Evidently, these students had not been advised to take college preparatory courses because they were not expected to continue their education, yet they did enroll in college. This points up a need to develop strong academic skills in all students, even those who may not have plans to attend college while in high school.

Some typical responses to this question were: " Study hard because college isn't anything like high school; you have to put forth more effort." "Study and take challenging courses, such as advanced English and sciences. Don't worry about the grade you receive in these courses. What is important is that these previous courses make your college level courses much easier and your college grades are what counts, not your high school grades." "Take four years of science, math, difficult English, and foreign language. Don't worry about your GPA. Worry about what you are getting out of the course." "Take all the tough courses (don't worry about GPA). Learn to use your time wisely and productively."

Other comments were: "Take harder classes so you will learn more and get good study habits. That way you will not be so shocked when you get to college." "Learn how to study properly and don't listen too much to the counselors. They were preparing me for vocational work rather than college." "Learn good study habits. Even though you can get by in high school, you can't in college." "I would tell them not to take easy courses just so they can get an A, but to take more difficult classes that will help them in college-like more math and chemistry." "Take a foreign language no matter how much you hate, loathe, or despise it. And stick with it!!"

SUMMARY

This study surveyed 500 university freshmen who were enrolled in 100-level courses during the spring semester of 1984. The students were asked about their high school preparation and their perceptions of its adequacy. The major findings were:

HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

1. A majority of the students said that too much of the work in high school was "busy work" and that they wished their high school classes had been tougher and more demanding. They did not feel, however, that they had chosen too many easy courses in high school.

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2. Nearly half of the students felt that they did not learn how to study in high school. This opinion was related to students' academic performance. Those students who were in the top 20 percent of their high school class and students who received a GPA≥3.0 at the university tended to disagree.

3. Almost one-half of the students said that their high school teachers did not teach study skills for their particular course.

4. The students wished that they had been required to do more writing and more serious reading in their high school classes. A majority of the students said they were able to get by in high school classes without completing reading assignments.

5. Little writing was required for daily class assignments. The number of required themes, essays, and term papers varied greatly. However, few (10 percent) of the students had essay tests in high school.

6. A large number of the students indicated thay they should have taken more mathematics in high school. This was especially true for those students who had lower ranks in their high school graduating classes, those who received lower GPA's during the first semester at the university, and those who did not take a college-preparatory curriculum in high school.

7. Nearly one-half of the students said that they seldom had to use the library in order to complete class assignments. Students from the larger schools tended to use the library more frequently than students from smaller schools.

8. Students varied on the amount of time they spent on homework each night. The most frequently reported response was two hours, but a combined 35 percent said one hour or less.

9. The majority of the students worked at a part-time job during their senior year in high school. Nearly one-fourth (24 percent) averaged from 16-25 hours of work each week.

10. There were few significant sex differences in the responses. A higher percentage of females tended to favor more required writing in high school classes. Females reported spending a significantly longer time on homework each night and significantly fewer hours each week at a part-time job.

11. Graduates of public and private high schools differed significantly in several respects: Students from public high schools were more likely to agree that their high school should have been tougher and more demanding, that they would have learned more if there had been more discipline, that there should have been more required writing and that they did <u>not</u> learn how to study in high school than were the students from private high schools. Students from private schools were more likely to agree that they had more essay tests, and had more required reading.

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PREPARATION FOR COLLEGE

12. Almost half of the students (48 percent) said that they "learned a lot" in most of their high school subjects; one-third said they "learned a lot" in about half of their high school classes. They felt that most of the academic skills they need for their college classes were worked on in high school.

13. These students felt that they received the best preparation in English and the poorest preparation in mathematics.

14. Nearly one-half (45 percent) of the students said they were satisfied with their high school preparation for college; approximately one-third (32%) were dissatisfied. The students who had high rank in their graduating classes and those who received higher GPA's at the university indicated greater satisfaction with their high school preparation.

15. The majority of the students rated their basic academic skills as adequate or better. Overall, they rated themselves highest on reading and lowest on mathematics and study skills.

16. Most of these students had performed satisfactorily during the first semester of college. The students who took a college preparatory curriculum in high school received significantly higher GPA's than those students who took a general or career oriented curriculum in high school. Furthermore, as expected, the students who performed well in high school as indicated by rank in class tended to perform well in college.

17. If they could take high school over again, these students would study more, would acquire good study skills, take more mathematics and English, and would do more reading.

18. The principal message that these students would send to beginning high school students could be summarized: "Don't waste high school." Specifically, they recommended to high school students that they learn how to study, that they study hard, take all the most difficult math, science, and English possible, read as much as possible, and learn to write essays and term papers.

DISCUSSION

Although the students surveyed in this sample expressed a wish for more extensive preparation in specific areas such as mathematics and English composition, they were generally satisfied with their over-all high school preparation. They felt that they had learned a lot in most of their high school subjects and had acquired most of the academic skills needed for college work. These freshmen did not rate their academic skills as low as many studies have reported. They tended to give ratings of adequate or better to all of the specific skills. Self-reported first semester GPA's of these students indicated that they had done satisfactory work at the university. Eighty-five percent reported GPA's equivalent to a grade of C or better.

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Using self-reported data involves some risks, of course. Students may deliberately distort responses such as their GPA's. They may overestimate their level of proficiency in the basic academic skills. There may be inaccurate recall of high school experiences. But if their anonymous responses can be accepted as validly reflecting their attitudes and experiences, it can be concluded that these students' level of academic preparation is superior to that reported in many studies of university freshmen. There are two interpretations that might be made. First, students coming to this university may be better prepared than their counterparts in other places and in previous years. Perhaps we are seeing the result of the efforts by the admissions office over the past several years to increase the academic ability level of entering freshmen. Secondly, there may have been a lowering of the standards in 100-level courses in order to accomodate the poorly prepared students. There are no data to support the latter.

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